6:Alexandre and Binet--158 G-5 (1946-1954) 1958 FH9 Fang FH9

4. Arts and Literature

531 The principal form of plastic art used to be sculpture, in wood or steatite. Aside from masks for associations, especially for the ngil, figures of ancestors, full-length figures or simply masks, and figures for ritual ceremonies were carved. Drums, seats, crossbows, sometimes imported chests, were decorated in demirelief. The features of a mask were only slightly indicated, the attitude of figures was rather stiff, while subjects in demirelief, particularly animals, were often very lively.

531 717 The sculptors were initiates of the different rites and with the decline of the latter, traditional sculpture has largely disappeared, to be replaced by work in wood or ivory in the Barbes /?/ or Saint-Sulpice style /the implication of the second is of the commercial religious art sold in shops near the St.-Sulpice in Paris. —Tr./, thanks to the work of schools and missions. An interesting project at the professional school in Ebolowa, under the director, Lecoq, between 1946 and 1950, has had no sequel. However, there are a few indications that allow hope for the rise of a Christian art that will perhaps be original, alongside the commercial sculpture for tourists, which is extremely flourishing.

This conclusion holds good for painting, since some frescoes in Catholic chapels, particularly in Ewondo country, appear to be manifestations of a new art. Furthermore, painting is at present the popular art par excellence, in the form of frescoes inside and outside houses. Aside from religious subjects, one often sees paintings of animals, family scenes, portraits of local or world celebrities. A Boulou from Sangmélima, David Monewoso, has established the features of the heroes of the novel Nnanga mbn in numerous frescoes throughout Boulou country. All this constitutes something new, because traditional art made little use of painting in this form. Huts were more likely to be decorated with geometrical figures with an esoteric meaning, in nothing but the three traditional colors, red, black, and white. Drawing was mostly represented by engraved designs, made with burin or red-hot iron on wooden objects, sometimes by charcoal drawings done on walls or rocks.

Literature was solely oral until the colonial period. It is not, however, accurate to say that the Pahouin were completely ignorant of writing. Aside from the quipu (biaff nzeghe —? —, according to

Largeau /sic/) and the mekutu alele, bundles of little sticks making it possible to communicate in code, they had a kind of pictography, ntilan, with tens, if not hundreds, of signs, mindem. These we know (insufficiently) from the counters used in the abia game, a kind of tarots, used as a game as much as for predicting the future; the pieces were made of the seeds, or rather the pods, of a mimosa common in the forest (Tetrapleura /125/ thonningii, according to Trilles). These signs had a surface meaning, understood by all, and an esoteric meaning, restricted to initiates. They made it possible if not to write down traditions as a whole, at least to draw up a kind of aid to memory to be used by the beyia bia. They also enabled scouts to leave messages for a main body of fighters that followed. Each clan, each family had its own ndem, sometimes depicted in its tattoo mark, ndan, which thus constituted a sort of coat of arms.

The old literature included stories or tales, minlañ, songs, bia, and chronicles, minkañete.

Trilles is responsible for collecting most of the tales (no. 165), which often took the form of fabliaux whose hero was none other than Ol' Br'er Terrapin, Kulu (emphatic or personal form of kul), the earth tortoise (Cinyxis erosa), surrounded by Beme, the wild pig, stupid and gluttonous, Ze, the panther, mean and cunning, its principal enemy; Zo'o, the elephant, the king of beasts; Abop, the spider, artful and obliging; and the majority of the other forest animals (except, it seems, snakes, which no one ever likes to mention). Kulu, thanks to his shrewdness, always ends by getting out of the holes in which his caustic spirit or the old hostility between him and Ze have put him. Tales of magicians were also told, or stories about the conjugal mishaps of supposed ancestors. All such tales were in the public domain and were recited by anyone who felt competent. This was also the case with the puzzles and riddles that young people put to one another as a kind of flirtation.

Songs, however, were performed by specialists, even aside from ritual or magical songs. Some were used to accompany dances; they represented the most complete form of musical expression, with the tone of the words supposed to fit the music while being related to the movements of the dance. There are still beyia bia competent to lead a dance of this kind by improvisation, but they are few and very expensive. There also still exist players of the mvet (harp-guitar), whose repertory includes, beside the old sung legends, some modern